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## WELCOME

We are so excited that you have made the decision to volunteer with Fundación En Vía! Our efforts collectively impact the lives of hundreds of individuals in the Oaxacan communities where we work, and it is an honor to have you join us for this important work.

The purpose of this guide is to orient you to who we are and what we do. It covers our history, current programs, provides guidance about expectations for volunteers, and also helps make sure you have as pleasant a stay as possible in Oaxaca.

## OUR STORY

Fundación En Vía supports the growth and creation of income-generating businesses, and encourages personal development through participatory programs that promote the empowerment of women, the well being of their families, and the strengthening of community. We do this through the unique combination of interest-free microloans, educational programs, and responsible tourism in Oaxaca, Mexico.

Although founded in 2010, we have been working since 2008 to help women around Oaxaca get themselves and their families out of poverty – and to give travelers a first-hand look at development, as well as a unique cultural exchange with the strong, hopeful and proud women living in the communities where we work.

En Vía was born out of a need to solve two basic problems people living in poverty face in Oaxaca: the interest rates on credit here, and the challenge of getting money from tourism to the people who need it most. Microfinance can be an excellent tool for helping families escape poverty – unfortunately, in Mexico, the interest rates the poor need to pay for loans can make it impossible for them to progress economically. The average interest rate in this country is 70 percent, and rates can even be 100 percent or more.

We don't charge any interest on the loans we give through our microfinance tours as a way to make sure that our borrowers have a much better option than commercial banks, and thus are able to leverage their loans to have a real impact on their small businesses and lives.

We also know that even though there is quite a bit of money flowing into Oaxaca from tourism, very little of it actually gets to the people who need it most. The idea of microfinance tourism is a simple way to funnel a tiny portion of this tourist money to the people who can most benefit from it, and to get it to them in a way that can have an impact over a longer period of time.

Some of our borrowers have used their loans to do the following:

- Open a home-based tienda (general store) to sell basic groceries to neighbors
- Begin making and selling handmade traditional candles that can be used in Teotitlán's church and at local ceremonies
- Invest in wool and dye so that an entire family can make and sell their own rugs in place of working for a large reseller

We are currently working with over 350 women through our loan program and reach many more community members through our educational programs. We serve 6 communities in Oaxaca: Teotitlán del Valle, Tlacoahuaya, Abasolo, Santo Domingo, Tomaltepec and San Miguel del Valle.

### **English Program**

Our English program, our first initiative beyond microloans, was launched in January 2010. Our free English classes are offered to the communities of Teotitlán de Valle and Tlacoahuaya. With our team of dedicated volunteers, we teach afternoon classes to over 50 students twice a week. The classes are Tuesday and Thursdays in Teotitlán and Mondays and Wednesdays in Tlacoahuaya. The classes run from 4pm-6pm in both locations.

The classes began on request from women in Teotitlán so they could better communicate with English speaking tourists and clients that visited their businesses. The classes gained momentum from there and we now offer classes for children and adults in the two communities, the majority of the students being youth from ages 6-16 but with a small group of adult learners as well. A long-term goal is to be able to offer English classes in more communities where En Vía is present.

The classes are split into one-month courses, with a total of 8 classes each. We ask volunteers to commit to teaching the duration of one course, dates vary due to holidays

and cancelled classes. Students enroll in the course by being present on one or both of the first two days of the course. Students may not miss more than two classes without repeating the course again.

### **Other Educational Programs**

In June 2011, we began giving business classes. The courses teach women about basic business skills, such as separating money and recording sales. The course aims to help women reach financial literacy, so that the women can better manage their business and the use of their loan.

We also provide our borrowers with access to branding and personal development workshops. This course provided them with a brand identity and ways to help them improve outreach.

In addition we have given Diabetes prevention workshops, nutrition classes, built fuel-efficient stoves and collaborated in many other needs-driven community projects.

*Along the way, we have brought people from around the world face-to-face with some of the opportunities and challenges of microfinance, and more importantly, with the ideas, strength and power of the women working so hard to improve the futures of their families.*

## **GENERAL EXPECTATIONS OF VOLUNTEERS**

We know from experience that volunteers often have many questions about organizational expectations relating to their work, dress and other issues. This section lays out our basic expectations for volunteers during their time with us, but if you have questions or anything is unclear, it is always best to ask.

### **Work and Assigned Tasks**

Volunteers should expect to adhere to the following work-related expectations:

- Each volunteer's role and responsibilities within the En Vía organization will be determined with an eye towards the needs of the organization and the volunteer's own particular interests and talents. If you are ever unclear about your role, please do not hesitate to reach out to a staff member.

- As an English teacher, the commitment is for at least two afternoons a week teaching EITHER Monday and Wednesday or Tuesday and Thursday. Some volunteers also choose to teach all four afternoons a week. Volunteers are expected to teach the full 8 classes of the course. Oftentimes, to keep the schedule regular there are one or two days that do not fall within the course dates, if a volunteer is here for a longer amount of time it is helpful for them to come to community on these days as well, but it is not strictly required.
- Classes run from 4pm-6pm in both locations. To get to class on time, we leave the Instituto Cultural Oaxaca (ICO) at 2:30pm to get to Teotitlán and 2:45pm to get to Tlacoahuaya. We take public transportation and consequently, this is the only cost associated with volunteering. Transportation costs 25-30 pesos round-trip, please bring small change to pay the bus, colectivo or mototaxi, generally they will not accept any bills bigger than 50 pesos. More detailed info in the Transportation section below.
- It is expected that volunteers plan their lessons based off of the curriculum outline provided by the English coordinator. The classes should be fun, dynamic and based on games and active learning. There are many materials in the En Vía office including books, games, flash cards, pens/pencils/markers and construction paper. There are whiteboards and markers in the communities however sometimes there are many classes and not every teacher will have a table. All the materials have been donated by past volunteers, if you are able to bring anything with you, please ask the English coordinator for a list of currently needed items.
- Additionally, we ask volunteers to attend two meetings that serve as a mid-course check-in and a final class hand-off meeting. These meetings will be held at **1:45pm on the day of the 4<sup>th</sup> class day and the day of the 8<sup>th</sup> class**, in the En Vía office.
- The individuals we serve are outstanding people, and they deserve our personal best when we are working on projects important to their communities. Please

continuously reflect on the importance of our work, which means completing all tasks to the highest standard.

- When you commit to working for En Vía for a given period of time, your role becomes crucial to our work and the communities that we serve. As a result, if you will not be able to meet the previously agreed upon commitment for a personal reason, please let us know as soon as possible.

### **Dress**

When we are working in communities as English teachers, tour guides or business teachers, we are directly representing the Fundación En Vía organization, and it is important that we do so in an appropriate manner that is respectful of the communities we serve.

Although it can be very hot at times, please dress respectfully for conservative communities. Please avoid short shorts or skirts, low-cut tops, visible undergarments or extremely tight clothing. Also, please check your t-shirt slogans to make sure there's nothing offensive or suggestive to explain if questioned about the English vocabulary.

### **Smoking**

Please refrain from smoking in front of our borrowers or English students. As you can see (from looking around the town at its colorful murals on everything from domestic abuse to obesity), the communities are very serious about their public health campaigns. It is important that we respect these initiatives while we are guests in the communities.

## **HEALTH AND SAFETY SUGGESTIONS**

While Oaxaca is generally as safe, if not safer, than many large American cities, it is still important to act with caution. Volunteers should consider the following:

- Avoid carrying large sums of money and/or expensive electronic devices in crowded markets or on public transportation.
- Avoid withdrawing large sums of money from an ATM at night.

- Be careful of one's surroundings late at night. If alone take a taxi to your destination.
- Do not carry your passport with you, but keep a copy for identification purposes.
- If you are approached in a robbery situation, do not resist and turn over any money that you have.
- Do NOT walk alone at night.
- Do NOT walk in low traffic areas such as Cerro del Fortin or the "steps".
- Do NOT wear any flashy jewelry.

In order to avoid falling ill while in Oaxaca, consider the following:

- Thoroughly wash all fruits and vegetables purchased at local markets with a disinfectant.
- Make smart choices about consuming street food. If a vendor is crowded, it is probably a safe bet. The first few weeks you will want to avoid street food until your body is more accustomed to the bacteria.
- Make sure that your housing choice has screens on bedroom windows to block mosquitoes from entering at night.
- Wear sunscreen to protect your skin from the harsh sun in Oaxaca.

## MICROFINANCE TOUR DISCOUNT

All volunteers who contribute to Fundación En Vía for at least one month are eligible to take our microfinance tour. Volunteers must cover the cost of lunch, generally around \$50 pesos. Although volunteers are not required to attend a tour, they are encouraged to do so in order to better understand the impact of their work.

## SPANISH CLASS DISCOUNT

All volunteers who contribute to Fundación En Vía for at least a month are eligible to have the cost of registration (\$50 USD) for Instituto Cultural Oaxaca Spanish language classes waived and volunteers can take 5 consecutive weeks of class for the price of 4. Unfortunately if you have already registered for classes, the registration fees cannot be



reimbursed. Those volunteers who contribute for a longer period of time are eligible for additional discounts, to be determined by the ICO and Fundación En Vía. Before contacting the ICO, please let the English coordinator know that you would like to take classes, so they can notify the ICO of the discount.

## CELL PHONE

While not required, having a cell phone during your time volunteering can be very useful for both work and social purposes. Both Telcel and Movistar sell new, basic phones for about \$300 MXN. Make sure to comparison shop amongst various Telcel stores (there are tons of these stores in Oaxaca) in order to secure the best price for a new phone. You must then purchase minutes (saldo) for these phones from local stores – you can either purchase a card to add the minutes yourself, or pay the retailer to automatically add the minutes to your phone. If you have an unlocked phone from outside the country, you can also purchase a SIM card for your existing phone, but this often proves a bit more expensive than just purchasing a new phone.

Thanks to past volunteers, En Via does have a few cell phones available to lend to volunteers. Please be sure to check in with the English coordinator to see if there is a cell phone available.

Also, note that if you will not be using your American or European wireless phone for a month or longer, you can “suspend” your service and pay a vastly reduced monthly bill during your stay abroad.

## TRANSPORTATION IN/AROUND OAXACA

Buses operating within the city of Oaxaca cost \$7 MXN. Taxis in Oaxaca typically charge between \$40 MXN for shorter distances and \$60 MXN for longer distances, but, in order to be certain, ask the fare for your destination before departing.

The bus to Teotitlán costs \$10 MXN and can be boarded at the far side of the baseball stadium on Niños Heroes. If the hourly bus has already departed, a bus to Teotitlán’s crucero is \$10 MXN plus \$5 MXN for the collective taxi or mototaxi into town. To return

home, we take a \$10 MXN direct bus that leaves at 6pm, we end class 10 minutes early to make sure we make the bus.

To get to Tlacoahuaya, we take the bus to the crucero, \$10 MXN , then a mototaxi, \$5 MXN, to the Municipio. To return from Tlacoahuaya, we take a colectivo, generally \$15 MXN.

Budget \$25-30 MXN for round-trip transportation each day.

## SHOPPING FOR NECESSITIES

The following stores and markets are popular for shopping:

- **Soriana** (Avenida Universidad 138): Large, US-style grocery store that also has a wide variety of household goods. Take any bus marked “Plaza del Valle” departing from Avenida Reforma outside the ICO. The store is surrounded by a large department store, shopping mall, movie theater, and chain restaurants.
- **Sánchez Pascuas Market** (Porfirio Diaz between Quetzalcoatl and Cosijopi): Medium-sized market with fresh vegetables, fruits and a small section of comedores offering good value meals. About 10 minutes walking from the ICO.
- **Centro Comercial Conzatti** (Humboldt one block south of Jardin Conzatti): Modern shopping center with a Telcel store, reliable laundromat and small, modern grocery store. About five minutes walking from the ICO.
- **Benito Juárez Market** (One block southwest of the Zócalo): Oaxaca’s most historic market offering fresh fruits and vegetables, sandwich and juice stands, and a variety of artesanías.

## POPULAR SIGHTS AND ATTRACTIONS

Past volunteers have found the following sights and attractions in and around Oaxaca to be very worth their time and money:

- **Monte Alban** ([http://www.advantagemexico.com/oaxaca/monte\\_alban.html](http://www.advantagemexico.com/oaxaca/monte_alban.html)): Ancient Zapotec ruins located just outside Oaxaca on a flattened hilltop offering gorgeous views of the city and surrounding mountains. Hourly buses are available from 8:30 AM to 3:30 PM departing the Hotel Rivera del Angel (Mina 518).
- **Oaxaca Etno-Botanical Garden** (<http://www.jardinoaxaca.org.mx/>): Outstanding collection of cacti and agave located behind the Santo Domingo Church in Oaxaca's Historic Center. Requires a guided tour.
- **Santo Domingo Museum and Cultural Center** ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Church\\_of\\_Santo\\_Domingo\\_de\\_Guzm%C3%A1n\\_\(Oaxaca\)#Museum](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Church_of_Santo_Domingo_de_Guzm%C3%A1n_(Oaxaca)#Museum)): Large collection of pre-Hispanic – and more contemporary – art and artifacts housed in a gorgeous former monastery building. Impressive collection that can occupy an entire afternoon.
- **Hierve del Agua** ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hierve\\_el\\_Agua](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hierve_el_Agua)): Set of natural rock formations and pools in the mountains outside of the community of Mitla. Very much like a natural infinity pool. Nature trails are also available. Pools can be reached via guided tour or by traveling to Mitla (via taxi or bus) and then heading to the pools via taxi or shared truck.

## LINKS TO LEARN MORE ABOUT OAXACA

The following sites offer reliable and updated information about Oaxaca and its environments:

- **Que Pasa Oaxaca** ([www.quepasaoaxaca.com](http://www.quepasaoaxaca.com)): Information on events, art exhibits, cine, and everything else going on in the city.
- **Oaxaca Wiki** (<http://oaxaca.wikispaces.com/>): Continuously updated, community-generated content about Oaxaca. Good place to find information about events and happenings.

- **Oaxaca Calendar** (<http://www.oaxacacalendar.com/>): Reliable, frequently updated events calendar.
- **Oaxaca Lending Library** ([http://oaxlibrary.org/Oaxaca\\_Lending\\_Library/Home.html](http://oaxlibrary.org/Oaxaca_Lending_Library/Home.html)): Web page of Oaxaca's English-language lending library, which also lists information about a number of lectures, trips and cultural exchanges sponsored by the library.
- **Planeta.Com** (<http://www.planeta.com/oaxaca.html>): Lots of original content about unique Oaxaca features, including its markets and religious celebrations.

## HIGHLY-SUGGESTED MICROFINANCE READINGS

In order to learn more about the work you will be doing as a volunteer it is important that you have a better understanding of microfinance and development work. Please read the articles that you find here - [http://www.envia.org/learn\\_more.html](http://www.envia.org/learn_more.html) before beginning your commitment.

## SHARE OUR WORK

The program's funding is largely generated through our tours. The funding is crucial to our work, and without it, En Vía would not be able to provide any of its programs. We ask that you share the work that you are doing at En Vía with your friends and family both here in Oaxaca and around the world.

## THANK YOU

Our organization has a small staff, but is able to accomplish so much, because of an incredible team of volunteers. We are very grateful for your support during your time with us. Thank you for committing to our organization. We are so excited to have you join us, and we hope you enjoy your experience with us, and your time here in Oaxaca.

Welcome to the team!